Mr. Glenzer on Mr. Dewey

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Three things I find most applicable to my situation while reading Dewey are his dissection of education into two parts, psychological and social, focus on stimulation of the child’s powers, and his ideas of the use of imagery that teachers must evoke in students.

Being a music teacher and in particular band director I believe immensely in the combined use of psychological or cognitive instructional strategies combined with creating a social environment and atmosphere that is conducive to learning, belonging, and espirit de corps.

Dewey’s idea of stimulating and training a child’s powers is an interesting concept. Many teachers might believe there students walk into their classes a blank slate, and thus must be infused with information throughout the year. I believe the students come in with past experiences that can benefit them; they come with powers, i.e. strengths and weaknesses, which must be identified and nurtured. Stimulating the strengths of students can improve self esteem and confidence, stabilize foundational concepts already understood, and have an impact on weaknesses that still need to be developed. The biggest impact of stimulating a child’s powers in my opinion is that the student understands these powers and connects with the concept of learning, enjoys the process of learning, the value of hard work, leading to becoming a lifelong learner.

Dewey’s ideas of imagery are fascinating, mainly the teacher translating content into imagery the student will think about. I always considered this one of the goals of teaching, having a student imagine the concept therefore understanding it. One can approach teaching a simple concept in a million different ways, hoping one of the ways connects with that individual learner. I believe the first step is understanding how the students will receive your instruction, and in taking Dewey’s ideas, how they will actually think about what you’re trying to teach. “Put yourself in the other person’s shoes” is an old saying that comes to mind when I think about what Dewey is trying to say. Many teachers use this strategy, which can be effective, but keeping in mind every single student has their own individual way of processing information, gain skill, and learn.

Two ways Dewey impacts my teaching situation is building a band program rather than just teaching individual band classes. Creating a band family, a social architecture for which my students can learn both cognitively and thrive socially is of utmost importance to the success of not only the classes but the performances musically. I akin this to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, where my goal is creating moments of self actualization, the highest need of the pyramid, during performances, where these moments can last the rest of the students lives, having a lasting impression in experiencing an educational and artistic experience. Creating a social atmosphere of close friendships between students and strong mentoring between conductors and musicians can make these moments possible.

An area where Dewey and I might disagree may be the aspect of creating citizenship through public education. Although I do not quite dismay at this concept, I don’t necessarily believe education has to have this duty of creating a certain populace to fill the needs of society. I see education as more of an institution with a directive on how to be a human being. Education in America as a public institution controlled by state and federal governments, it is obvious to see why these ideas have intertwined with Dewey’s philosophies. I also believe Dewey also was involved with economics and the corporate interests in education in America, which essentially wanted schools to train a better work force for the future.